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# IN PRAISE OF OLDER WORKERS





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Career Programs and Resources Branch writes and produces a variety of print and audio visual material on career related topics and develops resource kits and training materials for career practitioners.

In addition, the Career Resource Centre and Women's Career Resources provide consulting and resource services for career planning professionals.

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*The 21st century will see the number of youthful workers continue to decline, at the same time more men and women will live well past the age of 100 with continued good health and vigour. This sets the stage for profound changes in the way we think about older workers.*



**Cover**  
*Joe O., a teacher  
and luthier*

# WHO IS THE OLDER WORKER?

The older worker is considered to be the worker over 45, either in or out of the workforce. Those in their 50's and 60's experience most difficulty in finding work if displaced. Those past 60 who wish to remain in the workforce find little or no help in doing so. Counselling this growing population with its various needs at its various stages from blocked career paths through to a desire for part-time work on the other side of retirement is a massive job.

As one writer put it,  
"Older workers may be the greatest untapped natural resource  
this country has ever had."



### **Profile**

*Recently I, an older worker, had a strange conversation with a physically handicapped young worker. "What are you up to these days?" the young man asked.*

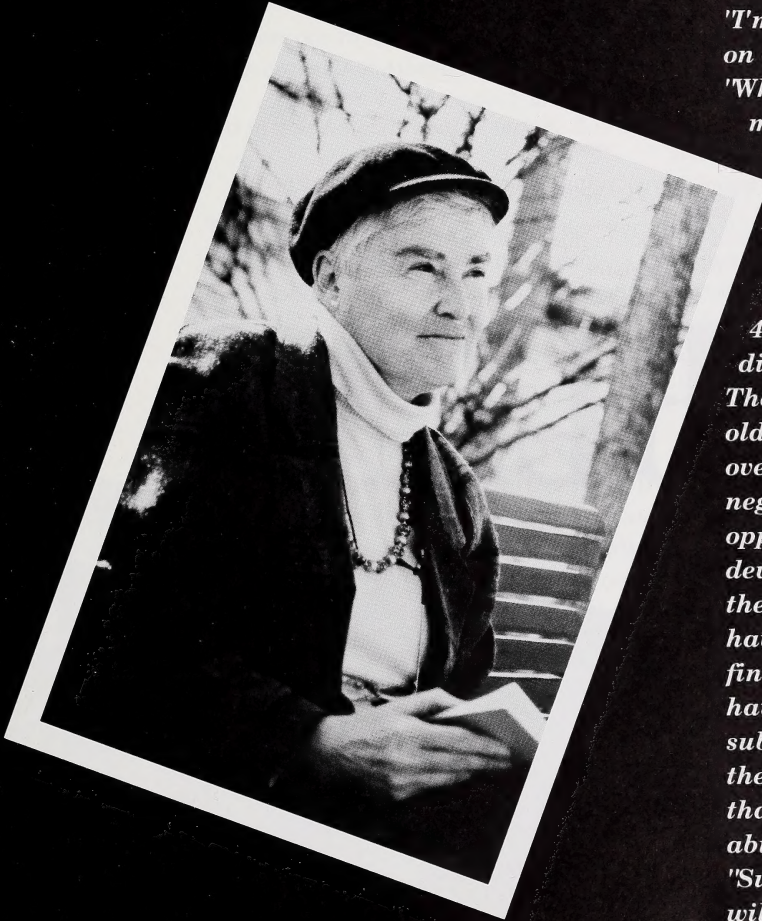
*"I'm writing a publication on older workers." I said. "Why?" he asked. "They make up such a small percentage of the workforce."*

*"Stories and statistics agree that workers over 45 experience discrimination.*

*There is evidence that the older worker gets passed over for promotion and neglected when opportunities for career development are offered. If they are unemployed they have a more difficult time finding jobs and most often have to take less pay. Both subtly and not so subtly they receive the message that they are losing their ability and competence."*

*"Surely this small problem will work itself out in time without interference." The young man wheeled towards his office.*

**Mary Woodbury**

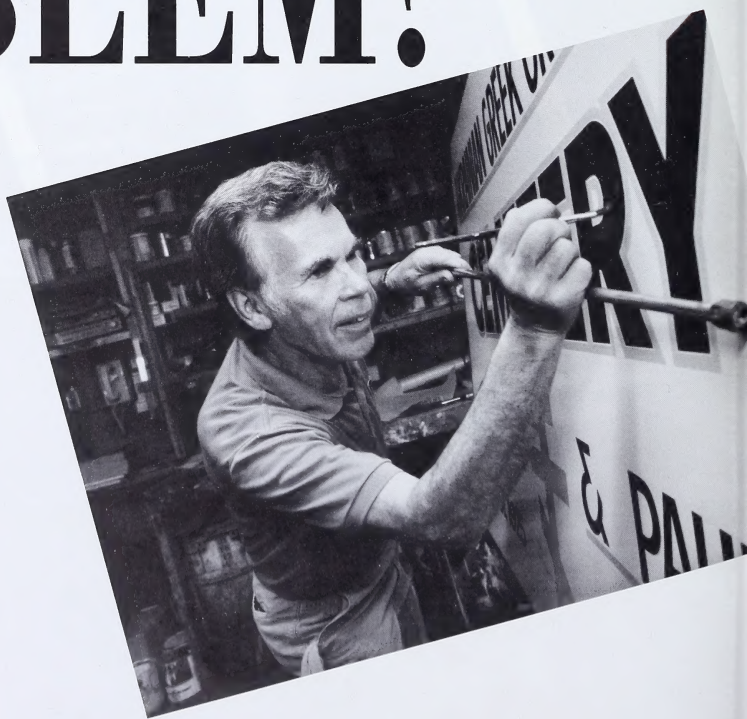




# IS THERE REALLY

**A** Robert Butler, Director of the U.S. National Institute of Aging in the 1960s coined the word "ageism". Ageism is a process of stereotyping, discriminating against people because they are older. Research has proved that both employers and employees are subject to and victims of ageism.

# PROBLEM?



## **Profile**

**Peter B., signpainter and business owner.** "Keep learning throughout your lifetime. Set high standards for yourself and make each project better than the last. I guess if I tried to analyze my success as a signmaker it would come down to two things. I have never had to advertise because my work speaks for itself. Secondly, I learn from others, watching new techniques and skills and using them in my own business."



## **OLDER WORKERS**

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### **POPULATION BASE**

In 1986, the total population of Alberta stood at 2.365 million people, of whom 583,000 were over 45 years of age.  
Almost one-third of the working age population (i.e., over 15) is over 45.

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### **LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPANTS**

Almost one in four members of Alberta's labour force is over age 45.  
More than one-half of Albertans over 45 (52.4%) are active in the labour market, including many over age 65.

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### **EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT**

The unemployment rate among older workers in Alberta is only 5.9%, compared to 7.4% in the general workforce, however, the duration of that unemployment is significantly greater than for workers 44 and under.  
Twice as many unemployed older workers as younger workers have been unemployed for more than one year.

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### **OCCUPATIONAL GROUPING AND WORK PATTERNS**

Older workers are more substantially represented in goods producing and blue collar occupations than are workers under 45.  
One in seven older workers is employed part time compared to one in twenty workers under 45.  
Older workers also have a greater tendency to self-employment than younger workers.

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### **PARTICIPATION IN THE TRADES**

Some 16,000 journeymen in Alberta's trades are over 45.  
This represents nearly one quarter of Alberta's certified trades people.  
The average age of a journeyman in Alberta is nearly 40.

---

### **DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS**

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, close to half of Alberta's population (42%) will be over 45.  
Less than 10% of the population will be in the 18-24 age group, normally the prime labour market entrant age.  
The median age of the population will rise to 41 years.

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# WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING US?

Older workers are faced with subtle discrimination in several ways.

Older workers confront blocked career paths. At any worksite there are a limited number of opportunities for advancement, especially in large pyramid or hierarchical organizations. Without a way 'up' some middle-aged workers lose their enthusiasm.

Older workers also face subtle discrimination from their fellow workers. Jokes about losing one's memory or being 'over the hill' abound. A quick glance at birthday cards for the over - 40 crowd demonstrates society's cynicism about aging.

Managers, unconscious victims of ageist attitudes, pass over older workers for promotions, retraining opportunities or internal transfers 'because they are close to retirement.'

Older workers are offered early retirement to make room for younger workers. They pick up the cues from their environment and tease each other, even believing the ageist message that they are in decline.

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**Jim Archibald**

*of Placement 45, a job finding service in Edmonton, says of the mature worker:*

*"We can help them with writing resumés and preparing for job interviews.*

*We have jobs available through interested companies looking for older workers with experience.*

*However it depends so much on the older worker's own attitude."*

---



## UNEMPLOYMENT AND RE-ENTRY

Unemployment is not a new problem for older workers, but for them it is more acute:

- Even when unemployment is low, older workers make up a large proportion of the long-term jobless. If laid off, they face a longer period of unemployment than younger persons.
- One in 12 men lose their job in midlife. They rarely find positions with as much salary or responsibility.
- Re-entry is difficult especially for those over 50. Three contributing factors are: the stereotypes held by management, the high salary demands of mature workers who equate salary with worth, and company personnel policies that discriminate against the older worker on the grounds that fringe benefits for them are too costly.
- Loss of job because of cutbacks, firings, layoffs or forced retirement during midlife can present overwhelming obstacles. Frustration, loss of self-esteem, loss of income and discouragement are among the results.

## Profile

*"I started to fly in my forties because it frightened me. I was spending too much time at home while my husband flew. The key to keeping lively is to read, study and meet new people. Take advantage of every opportunity that comes along. Take a risk and if it doesn't work out, try something else."*

**Mary O., education consultant and pilot**



Here's a couple of self tests to help you find out.

I haven't  
thought  
about it

1. I would choose to marry someone 15 years older than me. ....
2. I would date a person over fifty. ....
3. I would share a house with an older person. ....
4. Some of my best friends are over forty. ....
5. Most people I talk to at work are over forty. ....
6. When I need help in my job I turn to an older worker. ....
7. I would job share with an older worker. ....
8. I would hire someone older than me. ....
9. I would allow older workers to work as many years as they want. ....
10. I would offer all workers, young and old, opportunities for upgrading courses. ....
11. I would consider promoting an older worker. ....

[illegible]



**FOR WORKERS OVER  
FORTY, THEIR....**

	Increases after 40	Stays the same	Declines after 40	60	80	Comments
Intelligence .....						
Health .....						
Memory .....						
Physical fitness .....						
Sexual attraction and interest .....						
Decision-making .....						
Risk-taking .....						
Learning .....						
Job performance .....						

**SELF-INTERVIEW**

What do you think society believes about older workers' productivity and value at work?

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If you are an older worker how do you feel about your working life and ability?

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If you are younger, how do you think you will feel about your work after you are 45?

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1. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

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The next two pages outlines the myths and realities about aging. Check them over against your own test results, feelings and interviews.

# A LOOK AT MYTHS AND REALITIES

*A great enemy of truth is very often not the lie -  
deliberate, contrived and dishonest -  
but the myth -  
persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.*

**John F. Kennedy**

What are the most glaring stereotypes attached to mature workers -  
and what are the facts behind them? A summary follows:

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**MYTH**

Employees over 50 are less productive than  
younger workers.

**REALITY**

Most workers in their fifties and sixties are  
much more conscientious and hard working.

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**MYTH**

Older workers are sick a lot.

**REALITY**

Workers between 17 and 44 call in sick an  
average of 3.7 days annually. Those over 45  
call in sick an average of 3.1 days annually.  
This is according to Insurance data.

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**MYTH**

Older workers are more likely to leave.

**REALITY**

Older workers are more stable. In fact, older  
women workers change jobs 88 per cent less  
than younger women.

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**MYTH**

Young bosses are more competent.

**REALITY**

Employers are not convinced. The age of  
candidates for top positions in industry has  
increased over the last 15 years.



**MYTH**

Older bosses are not as decisive and don't evaluate information as well.

**REALITY**

Studies prove that older managers have more experience. They tend to evaluate information more capably. They do take longer to make a decision and don't risk as often. This may be an asset.

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**MYTH**

Intelligence declines with age.

**REALITY**

Age appears irrelevant. Studies say 70 year olds are still functioning with high intelligence. Research is pushing that further. At any age knowledge can be lost if not used.

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**MYTH**

Old people suffer from memory loss.

**REALITY**

It only seems that way to others. They have more to remember.

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**MYTH**

Older workers are set in their ways, unwilling to learn new methods.

**REALITY**

Current educational research has discovered that older persons learn as well as younger people. The teaching methods may be modified but not the content.

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**MYTH**

Older workers have more accidents.

**REALITY**

The accident record of mature workers is better than that of younger workers. They may work more methodically but it's usually smarter. (see page 29 for more information).

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**MYTH**

Older workers demand special treatment and facilities.

**REALITY**

This is not true. Handicapped individuals who are older workers may need these. That's ten per cent of the population, young and old.

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**MYTH**

Older workers cost more.

**REALITY**

Health care premiums are less as they have no dependents. They are sick less often. Most companies believe their older workers are worth more because of their experience and value to the business.

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**MYTH**

People over 50 lack ambition.

**REALITY**

Most older workers have clearer reachable goals than younger workers.

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**MYTH**

Most older workers are interested in slowing down.

**REALITY**

More 55 to 65 year olds are entering the workforce than ever before. Given their choice, half of retirees in one research sample were interested in full or part time work.

# THE CHANGING FACE OF CANADA



## *Profile*

**Robert S., custodian and family man.** *"I stay until the work is done. That's not extra work, that's essential. I don't let the clock tell me what to do. I let the work dictate.*

*It's important to learn all you can, take courses and prepare. But then, make sure you use what you learned. Otherwise it is wasted.*

*The older I get the more I realize that being a master at your job is not enough. Mastery extends to all aspects of your life. For me, my family is part of that."*





## HOW WE HAVE CHANGED

The average age of the Alberta population is rising. The size of the 15-to-25 age group is declining while the number of Albertans aged 45 years and older is increasing. A falling birth rate and decreased in-migration from other provinces have caused this demographic shift. As a result, the job seekers of the 1990's will come from different age groups than those of the 1980's.

Aging householders will become net savers rather than net borrowers. The demand for entertainment, sports and travel industries will increase as cash-rich baby-boomers explore their leisure options. A shift in overall government policy direction is expected - from children and family issues to elderly and adult issues such as leisure activities, inflation, morality, public transportation and local community facilities upgrading.

The labour force will grow more slowly -- which means fewer young labour market entrants. This could lead to a labour force that is less mobile from an occupational, geographical and industrial perspective. Retraining for new careers will assume greater significance, so there will be a continuing need for training facilities and development of new modes of course delivery.

The aging and relatively well-educated baby-boom generation will be very productive. However, baby-boomers will require retraining in order to keep their technological skills up-to-date.

The aging of the population has far-reaching implications for the cost and nature of social and health problems. An increased demand for health care and subsidies is expected. The growing number of frail elderly may increase the need for publicly provided income and services.

## IN PRAISE OF OLDER WORKERS

### FORCES THAT TEND TO SHORTEN WORKING LIFE

Hiring practices discriminate against older workers - particularly those over 50.

Our youth-focussed society assumes that young people are the primary source of vitality, dynamism and innovation.

A current slow-growth economy means older workers who would like to enter or re-enter the work force cannot find jobs.

Rising labour costs encourage employers to reduce the number of long-time workers.

Labour union policy is aimed at better and earlier pensions.

Younger employees compete with those 55 and above for opportunity within the organizations.

### FORCES THAT TEND TO PROLONG WORKING LIFE

The rapidly rising cost of social insurance and benefits and the high cost of living combined with increasing longevity may make it worth while for both employers and employees to raise the retirement age.

Changes in the demographics of the labour force - the combination of less young people and more mature workers in the work force - may lead employers to encourage later retirement.

Improvement in health, vigour and longevity may result in workers wanting to continue working.

A highly educated work force will have a stronger desire to remain in work. Currently lawyers, doctors, and clergy may change the type of hours of work when they pass 65 years of age, but many do not retire.

Expanded use of flextime, part-time and sabbaticals will allow a better balance among the different areas of life which compete for a person's time -- work, family and leisure.

As pension and benefit packages become more flexible and portable, a continued working life will become more attractive.



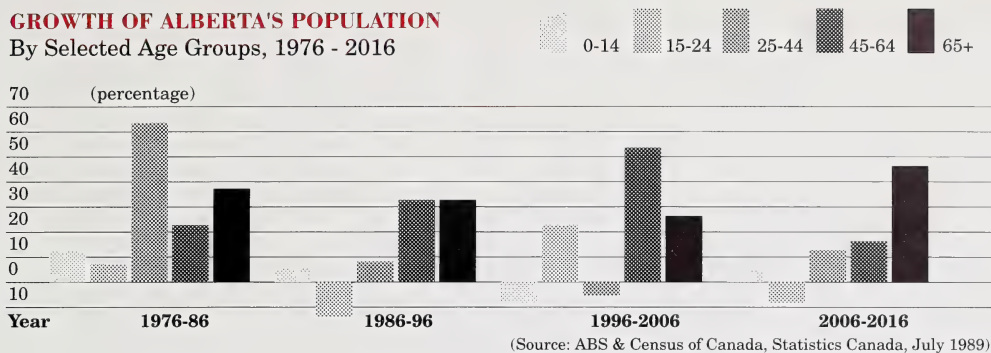
### **Profile**

**Jo H., flight instructor and aviation inspector,** "In 1979, I started instructing flying. I'd been a nurse, and a parent, active in swimming and camping. People think you stop having adventures and new experiences as you get older. For me the challenge is always ahead."



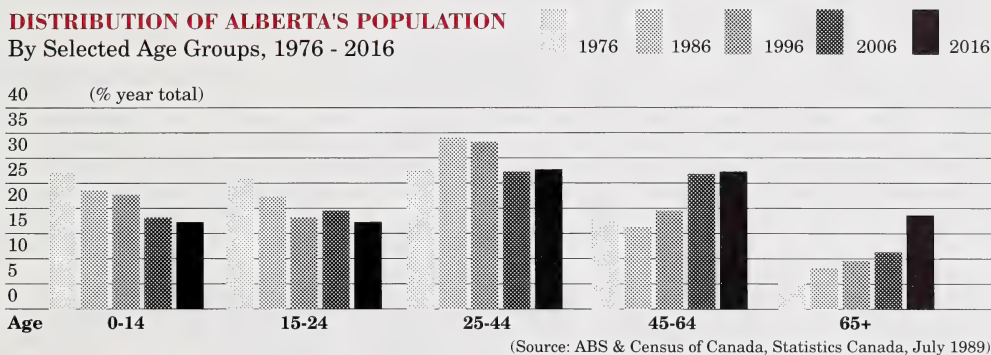
## GROWTH OF ALBERTA'S POPULATION

By Selected Age Groups, 1976 - 2016



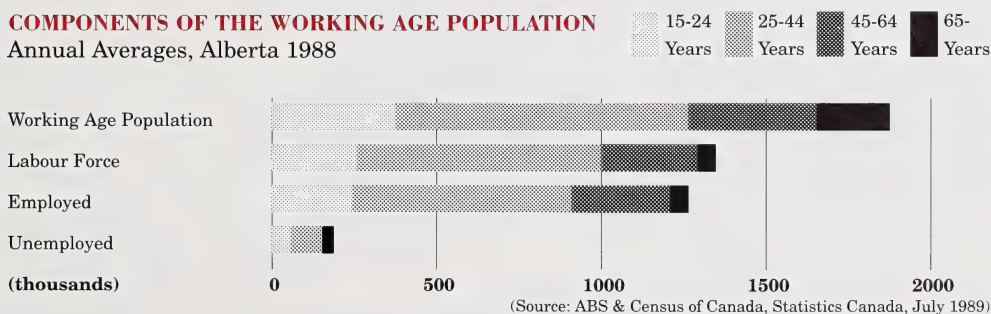
## DISTRIBUTION OF ALBERTA'S POPULATION

By Selected Age Groups, 1976 - 2016



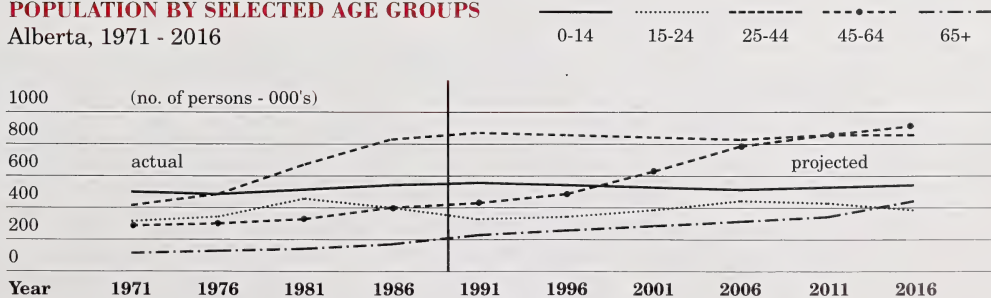
## COMPONENTS OF THE WORKING AGE POPULATION

Annual Averages, Alberta 1988



## POPULATION BY SELECTED AGE GROUPS

Alberta, 1971 - 2016



# WHAT CAN THE OLDER WORKER DO?

Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

*"To be seventy years young is  
sometimes more cheerful and hopeful  
than to be forty years old."*

How should the older worker overcome some of these difficulties?  
One way is to ignore stereotypes. Another is to opt for retraining.

If negative self-image and life-long beliefs in the lessening ability of the older worker inflict the workers, they need to concentrate on the positive values of being who they are.

Those who have examined the situation carefully, value older workers for their experience, knowledge, work habits and attitudes.

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*Today's older workers are of a generation that was taught that you can't teach an old dog new tricks ... you have to make way for the incoming generation. They've been conditioned to believe that they have to get out because they are not capable of learning."*

**David Gamse**

Director of American Association of Retired Persons



### *Profile*

*"I was laid off when I was 60", said Erich, "I knew there weren't any jobs for someone my age. My wife and daughter said 'Come on, let's go into business,' We opened a small plant in Sherwood Park in 1983. It became too much work to do manually. We had to decide to expand or close. We had the idea, we had the skill, but we needed capital. That's when we found partners. They invested in the company."*



*"I never found a good noodle here," said Friedel, who worked formerly in printing, then hair-dressing. "I always try to do something that is challenging. I have come up with new products, fruit noodles, chocolate, even."*

*"If you stop and do nothing, you will die," said Erich, "I'm 65. You have to keep active. Especially, your mind needs to keep busy."*

*"I'll have to live another fifty years to do it all," added Friedel, "Or else come back again."*

**Erich and Friedel W.**

# YOU'RE OVER 45 AND UNEMPLOYED! WHAT NOW!

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....adapted from a handout for Placement 45, written by  
**Jim Archibald**

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This is something you never expected.

Over the years you have worked hard. You bought life, car and home insurance to protect against the unexpected. You paid unemployment insurance. But, you never thought of being unemployed yourself. Today more and more mature workers are facing unemployment.

Look at today's job market: many highly skilled, educated and trained people of all ages competing for the jobs available; many jobs requiring new skills or special training; many jobs offering less money and less prestige.

The employer's funds may be limited. He must find someone who **can** do the job, is **willing** to do the job and is prepared to accept less money than the same job paid when the economy was better. As the employer must be realistic in evaluating salaries for particular jobs -- so you must be realistic in your salary expectations. Sure, you may have earned 30 to 50 thousand dollars a few years ago, but what are you earning now?

Many of us were caught in the salary trap. The longer we worked, the more we made. A drop in income signaled a drop in worth.

Let's look at two workers. One works long hours, carries the burden of many responsibilities, operates under considerable stress and has a comfortable income. She **enjoys her income!** The other person has a lower income but is doing work that is very satisfying. He relates well to his co-workers and **enjoys his work!** He can relax at the end of the working day and looks forward to his days off.

Shooting for an equal or higher income than your "best year" may hurt you more than you know. It may not be possible. Accept unemployment as a chance to think about what is really important.

First, decide what your options are. Determine what you have to offer an employer. Be enthusiastic when you talk with friends, relatives and others about your goals and objectives. Ask them for advice and contacts. Eighty per cent of the job openings are filled by networking, knocking on doors, following leads. Update your resume. Consider upgrading courses. Analyze your hobbies to see if a change of career direction could lie in that direction. Try not to complain about being unemployed. Don't concentrate on blaming someone for your unemployment. Instead, plan your future carefully. Remember persistence pays off. Form a job club if you have friends who have been laid off. Decide to give yourself a chance to enjoy life more while offering your time and skills to an employer who will appreciate you.

## WHAT ABOUT RETRAINING?

Studies have found that older workers who go for retraining or upgrading learn just as well as younger trainees when given self-paced, programmed instruction. Mature persons tend to do better than younger ones on tests requiring pre-planning and making certain kinds of decisions. Apparently the wisdom gathered through experience pays off.

Intelligence as measured by IQ tests remains virtually constant over the life cycle. Intellectual abilities associated with creativity -- such as an ability to create ideas, express oneself and work freely with ideas -- seems to increase with age.



Evidence further shows that older workers are more likely to complete their training and stay longer with their employers.

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*Companies that have taken steps to capitalize on the skills and experience of senior workers cite them as more productive than younger workers by every accepted measure.*

**David Ney**

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So if the stereotypes and myths depress you, the message is 'Forget the stereotypes!' If you want to keep working you have much going for you.

### HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WORK?

According to Jerome M. Rosow and Robert Zager in *The Future of Older Workers in America*, older people are more and more capable of working many years beyond retirement, and often are eager to do so.

"Family situations have changed....With the loosening of family ties, older workers are less inclined to retire and give up the social aspects of their jobs.

"Retired people are finding it difficult to cope with inflation. . . . For many retirees continuing to work may be the only solution to financial problems.

"Today's older workers differ markedly from those of previous decades. . . . Age 50 today corresponds to age 40 or 45 in 1970. They began working later than their predecessors, so the extension of work life may not mean an actual lengthening of career."

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*Older workers will remain on the job past age 70 and then start new careers/businesses. The baby boomers will not retire if it means giving up power and money. They will franchise geriatric health clubs. They'll demand genuine work and job satisfaction until the last day. Look for more early firings since the majority won't agree to take early retirement.*

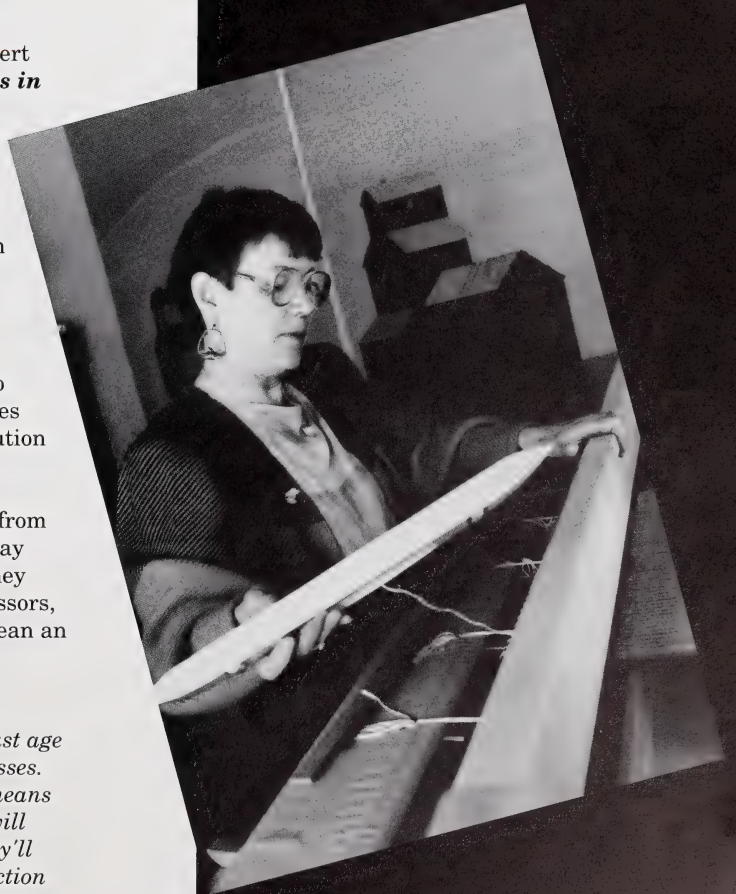
**Kennedy's Career Strategist, June '89**

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### Profile

*"There is always another level of expertise to strive for. I love weaving so much that I lose myself in my work. Sometimes I discover the sun rising and I am still at the loom. Maybe that is the secret of working for many years. If you are doing something you love, time passes quickly."*

**Pirkko K., artisan, weaving instructor and author**



## IN PRAISE OF OLDER WORKERS

### SOME TIMELY TIPS.

The advice for older workers whether they are unemployed or dissatisfied is the same:

1. Look at your own beliefs and stereotypes.
2. Don't succumb to your own stereotypes or any that you hear from management, from younger workers, or from the media.
3. Take a good look at your own career and life planning goals.
4. Make sure you don't apologize for your age. Be proud of your experience, wisdom and potential.
5. Seek retraining or new skills through your organization or at your local college or university. By the mid 1980's the average age of students had radically altered. Nine out of every 20 students are between 25 and 40 years of age. Many are older.
6. Get involved in leisure or volunteer activities.

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*In my work, much reference is made to the baby boom generation and the great changes to meet their wants and needs. However, I remind people that the parents of that generation certainly can lay claim to their childrens' attitudes and values - we had to get them through those 1960 years! In the field of recreation, leisure and fitness / physical activity, the late 50's and early 60's have taken a quantum leap forward from their cohorts of even 5 years ago. This concept could be used to bridge the gap between the older worker aged 45 through to 65+.*

**Marion MacCallum**

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### WHAT'S THE FUTURE HOLD?

In Canada's Aging Population, Susan A. McDaniel, the author, outlines the five assumptions used to frighten us about the future 'aging' of society. These myths are that:

1. The growing size of the older population is new and unexpected.
2. The unprecedented number of older people will inevitably lead to inter-generational warfare and other social problems.
3. An increase in the proportion of older people will mean an increased burden for those of working age (currently envisioned as 25 to 65, with many early retirees of 55).
4. An aging population will do nothing to reduce that dependency burden themselves.
5. Growth in the older population necessarily has negative economic consequences.

Susan McDaniel believes all these assumptions about aging in Canada are wrong. She foresees a future with a more cyclical pattern to study — work — leisure rather than the current linear model of school — work — retirement. "In the future, retirement may not be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, nor the transition from paid work to leisure. Retirement could occur several times within a lifetime, as career changes are made. The significance of retirement may change dramatically from what it was when a person had a single career, often a single job, from which she or he retired. Given that an increasing number of future retirees come from the idealistic baby boom generation, we can expect more multiple retirements in the future of Canada."

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*A second career is like a plant whose seed has been sown in the midst of a person's active life, which has taken root, which has developed tentatively at first but which bears all the fruits of retirement.*

**Paul Tournier**

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### **Profile**

*"I wouldn't have lasted for 18 years in this job if it hadn't been for the wonderful support of my co-workers. The poor people I work with support me as well. The in house staff have taught me so much. I wish every office had older workers. They have acted as mentors.*

*One of the grandest things about older workers is they have wisdom and insight. They can pass on that wisdom. I'm older now and have had more experience. I am comfortable with who I am and can pass on my gifts. I used to think that growing old would be boring. It's the most exciting, beautiful thing. Being in my fifties is great.*

*When I was a child, I loved being around old women of 75 or 80. Those pioneer women had had some terrible experiences but had come through. They worked the farm, started co-ops, raised families. They filled so many roles.*

*I hope we can do the same for our children. How did we survive some of our tragedies. Still we have beautiful things to pass on.*

*Places that dump their older workers are making a mistake. Without the wisdom of the old, the young cannot survive."*

**Mary B., family counsellor  
and social worker**



# WHAT CAN MANAGEMENT DO?

*Did you know? . . .*

*that fewer people over fifty are filing age discrimination complaints because smaller companies are eager to hire them?*

**Kennedy's Career Strategist**

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*Canada's shift from an industrial to an information-based economy and substantial demographic changes will throw a double-whammy at employers' recruiting efforts in the 1990's.*

*Competition for fewer post secondary school graduates will increase as Canada's birth rate continues to decline.*

*Employers will have to adapt job structures and work schedules and benefits to entice older workers to remain in the workforce.*

*Larger numbers of immigrants with the right skills are required -- and employers will have to manage more cultural diversity in their employee population.*

*Given the growing need for technological skills, the major recruitment challenges of the 90's will hinge upon retraining as much as on recruitment.*

**Canadian HR Reporter, January 11, 1989**

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In The Age Wave Ken Dychtwald talks about the seniors boom. The combination of aging baby boomers and a birth dearth have shifted the demography of the Western world. Business leaders, as well as human relations personnel and managers, have to take a long hard look at where the workers of the future are going to come from. That future is very close. Already the hospitality industry is beginning to hire 'the Grampies' for many positions it can no longer find teenagers to fill. There are a growing number of people over 60 who are GRAMPIES -- Growing, Retired, Active, Monied or Motivated People In Excellent State. Banks, trust companies, and many other business organizations realize the benefits of hiring, retraining or un-retiring older workers.



### **Profile**

*"A few years ago, three friends of mine were offered early retirement from the Alberta government. One went overseas with an agency working with water resources in Africa. One moved into real estate and the third opened his own consulting business. That sure destroys the myth that older workers lack flexibility and willingness to risk. I think we'll see a much more flexible, cyclical career path in the future."*

*As for me, I am finding my fifties very exciting. I've started a new job, I'm in better physical shape than I've ever been, and my third book is at the publishers."*

*Running three or four times a week keeps me alert and ready for any physical or mental challenge."*

**Clair W., clergy and university professor**



# DON'T OVERLOOK THE NEEDS OF THE OLDER EMPLOYEE

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by

**Dr. John Towler**

of Creative Organizational Design,  
a management consulting firm in Canada

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Imagine this scenario: as manager of your department, you can send one person to a one week training seminar. Should you send Susan or Harry? Both hold similar positions now and are good, effective employees. Successful completion of the program could open the doors for a promotion. The only difference between them is that Susan is 42 and Harry is 58.

Too many managers would send Susan, reasoning that because she is younger, she will stay with the company longer, that she can learn more easily than Harry and that she will be able to apply what she will learn more readily. Managers who think and act like this are guilty of letting their age biases interfere with their judgment. In fact, each of the assumptions this manager made about the greater abilities of a younger employee are false. If these are the only reasons for choosing Susan, the manager is making a serious mistake.

Knowing how to manage the older employee is becoming an essential skill for everyone in any kind of business. As our population has aged, so has our workforce. The changing demographic nature of our society means that we will have more and more older people working longer than ever before. If you are responsible for supervising or managing people, you will have to know how to manage the older employee and how to get the best from your workers.

Now let's be honest. Most of you would have chosen Susan wouldn't you? This is because you are afflicted with a form of biased

thinking called ageism. This is the negative stereotyping of older people. Most of us are guilty of ageism. It is nothing more than a host of misconceptions about elderly people based on inaccurate information and erroneous models that we see in the mass media. The problem is that we grow up with relatively little contact with older people while our culture has glorified youth and denigrated aging.

For example, think of an older person and what image pops into your head? A frail, foolish and useless grandfather or grandmother? The cranky old man who chased you when you were a kid? The "little old lady in tennis sneakers" who is the butt of jokes in the media? Why don't we automatically think of people like George Burns, Bob Hope, Pablo Casals, Albert Einstein, Agatha Christie or any of the thousands of other active, productive older people? It's because we are afflicted with ageism.

Few managers seem to realize that they have a terrific resource in their older workers nor do they know how to tap it. What a waste of manpower! Studies of older employees have shown that they are not dogmatic and instead of being less creative than younger people, they tend to be more innovative. In fact, creativity seems to be inversely related to age. Is the real problem simply that no one is asking or permitting the older worker to contribute new ideas?



Now that you know something about ageism in the workplace and the problems it can create for you, what should you do about it? Begin by examining your own beliefs and biases. How do you treat older people in general and in the workplace in particular? Can you develop the ability to see examples of ageism on the job, in the media and in your social life? Here's an interesting way to get started. The next time you are watching TV, analyze the program for the ways in which it treats the elderly. Does it present positive, realistic models or just stereotypes? Unless you are watching *Golden Girls*, you'll be shocked at what you see.

Develop and implement a career management system for your older workers. Some may want early retirement, some may wish to work for as long as they can. Most will feel somewhere in the middle, but all want to continue to feel that they are a productive part of the workforce. If you assume that they are simply putting in time and waiting to be put out to pasture, you will probably treat them accordingly, setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy in which they will slow down because they think you expect it.

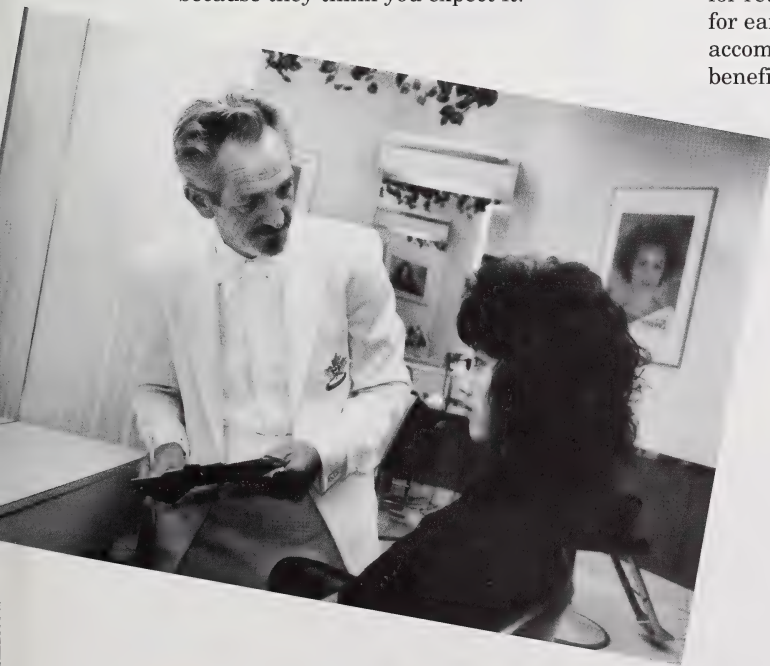
Find out what they want, then figure out how to give it to them. Look for employees who have suffered technological job displacement. These people often suffer psychological damage and need help getting their careers back on track.

Establish a performance appraisal system that will accurately, fairly and adequately measure the work performance of your older workforce. If you don't have a performance appraisal system in place, get one. If you have one now, examine it to make sure that it is suitable for older workers. Are you unwittingly creating problems by allowing skill obsolescence, job burnout, or plateauing to take place? Each of these will result in loss of motivation and performance problems.

Make sure that you are maintaining the skills of your older workers. A well developed training and development program is essential for all members of your firm and especially for older employees.

Review your retirement program. Is your plan flexible? Do you help your people plan for retirement? Is it in your interest to allow for early, on-time and flexible retirement accompanied by changes in pensions, health benefits, career training and skills.

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### **Profile**

**John T., hairdressing instructor, international judge and author,** *"If I did not constantly challenge myself with new and exciting options, I would stagnate. A working person needs to concentrate on making progress or else they will regress. I like to be creative in everything I do."*

## IN PRAISE OF OLDER WORKERS

### TEN TIPS FOR MANAGERS:

Industrial forecasters suggest several ways managers can prepare themselves to deal constructively with older workers in their workforce.

1. Examine your own beliefs and biases.
2. Develop the ability to spot examples of ageism on the job, in the media, and in your social life.
3. Develop and implement a career management system for your older workers.
4. Find out what the older workers want and figure out how to give it to them. e.g. early retirement, continued full-time or part-time work.
5. Look for employees who have suffered technological job displacement. Offer help to get them back on their career path.
6. Establish performance appraisals that accurately and fairly measure the work performed by your older workforce.
7. Watch for problems like skill obsolescence, job burnout, or plateauing. These result in loss of motivation and lead to performance problems.
8. Maintain a well developed training program, especially for your older workers.
9. Review your retirement program. Is it flexible? Do you provide pre-retirement training? It is in your interest to offer early, on-time and flexible retirement schemes.
10. Consider changes in pension plans, and health benefits.

In general, job attitudes and work behaviours of older workers smooth business operation. Older workers do not necessarily perform better than younger -- however they are self-reliant, experienced, conscious of workplace climate and responsive to job demands.

There is evidence to support the theory that workers entering their 40's need to experience growth and upward mobility. The older worker therefore needs to have a responsive organization or employer who offers staff development, adequate human resource planning, and eliminates barriers to promotion.

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*Older workers have greater needs for security and affiliation and lower needs for self-actualization. They tend to be more satisfied with work itself, pay, promotion, supervision and co-workers. Older workers report high levels of motivation and job-involvement. They tend to stay longer with their organization.*

from **The Aging Worker**

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### *Profile*

*"I flew any plane the Air Transport Auxiliary asked me to — Spitfires, Mosquitoes, Mustangs, Dakotas. During the war, the Air Transport Auxiliary took the new or fresh planes up to the front and brought back the damaged one for maintenance and repairs. We lost 25% of our pilots. We have been called the forgotten pilots.*

*I just got back from the fiftieth anniversary celebration in England.*

*I've been a waitress, test pilot, flight instructor. I started flying in 1935. Two weeks of waitressing would give me enough money for a twenty mnute flying lesson. Anyone who thinks being a pilot is easy and glamorous hasn't tried it. It takes perseverance and determination. It takes commitment. You have to be very dedicated.*

*I still fly. I was up two weeks ago in that strong wind. It's exhilarating. My life is very full. I give God all the glory for any success I've had."*

*Vera S., World War  
Two pilot, flight  
instructor*



# EMPLOYERS!

How often have you looked at a resume or interviewed a prospective employee and thought to yourself, "This person is over-qualified for the position I am trying to fill" or "This candidate is older, too experienced and probably would not fit in with our company?"

If you have made such a decision recently, you may have passed up the opportunity to hire a person with maturity, loyalty and skill.

During times of high unemployment the employer has a wider choice when hiring new employees. Many may be willing to work for a lower salary. Unfortunately, we believe that more experienced older workers will have high expectations in salary and work environment.

Currently a number of mature and experienced Albertans are unemployed. Typists, filing clerks, bookkeepers, sales people, managers, engineers and other highly trained and experienced individuals are available.

Many of these people have recognized and adjusted to the economy. They do not have to be in charge in order to enjoy working to help a company succeed.

The next time you hear yourself saying "too experienced", "over-qualified", or "too old", consider these points.

Edited from a handout by **Jim Archibald** of Placement 45

## ADJUSTING TO AN OLDER WORKFORCE

A study by William Werther found that most supervisors conceive of part-time workers as young and unskilled. As a consequence employers do not seek or interview mature applicants. Part-time employees solicited from the employer's existing labour force or from those who have retired from the company offer the added advantage of company loyalty, specific job skills and company-related experience.

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I remember one business owner phoning and asking for one of our younger workers. I asked him whether he wanted an enthusiastic 65 year-old or a staid 45. He said 'Send me the lively 65.'

**Jim Archibald** of Placement 45

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*During the next two decades, labour shortages and the need to develop attractive options to retain or attract older workers are likely to become increasingly important reasons for the development of part-time jobs.*

**Lois Farrer Copperman & Frederick Keast**

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Prejudice seems to be particularly applied to those in high tech jobs. In a study of 2,500 engineers and managers in 60 companies, two researchers concluded that the performance decline syndrome was a symptom of discriminatory personnel practices rather than skill obsolescence.

Dr. Mark Novak writing in *Successful Aging: the myths, realities and future of aging in Canada*, makes some interesting observations that might help employers and human relations managers develop a clearer view of the mature worker's real value. "Older workers sometimes produce at



lower rates but are at least as accurate and steady in their work as younger workers. Moreover, older workers output tends to increase with age. They perform at steadier rates from week to week . . . They also have less job turnover and take time off work less often than younger workers."

Older workers also have fewer accidents than younger workers. A study of 18,000 workers in manufacturing plants found that workers beyond age 65 have about one-half the number of non-disabling injuries as those under 65. And older workers have substantially lower rates of disabling injuries.

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*"People should be able to stay on at work as much as they want and retire slowly . . . so they don't face the shock at 65."*

#### **A Swedish insurance official**

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#### **Profile**

**Doug G., electrician,** "The young have to learn to start at the bottom and work their way up. Now that I've been in the business for 28 years I know that pleasing the customer is the most important thing.

*If you have all the skills, experience and know how, but are lacking enthusiasm, that will make your work less outstanding. Your attitude, appearance, communication skills, and sense of fun will give you an edge over other workers.*

*But that only comes with maturity."*

If the fitness and health of older working people continues to improve while at the same time job opportunities for them in the Canadian workforce continue to shrink, something will have to give.

As Maddy Dychtwald of Age Wave, Incorporated said in a speech in Edmonton recently: "The baby boomers are not going to put up with it. Considering that they make up approximately a third of our population, when they reach middle-age, attitudes toward older workers will change. The people who said 'never trust anyone over thirty' are now in their forties. If business, government and industry don't wake up to their needs soon they are in for a rude shock. The barriers and stereotypes about older people will come down."

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*"We are all aging. We have discovered that older workers are a valuable asset and that older people, not younger people, are in the growing majority and have more disposable income than any other age cohort. That will do more to convince us to change our ageist attitudes than anything else."*

*The message that is to be shared and studied is that learning the art of growing old should be, and can be, one of our great personal achievements. 'In the art of aging, the art of living reaches its highest level.'*

**John McMannus**

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# SOLUTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Flexible career patterns that consider downward mobility to be as natural as upward mobility may be developed in the future.



## **Profile**

**Grace F.**, "It was a long way from my farm kitchen to this office," Grace smiles as she looks up from her desk in the library. Once her children had left home Grace realized she wanted to return to the workforce. "I had a friend who did it first. At the age of 40, she went back and became an editor of a small newspaper. I figured if she could do it so could I. She was a good role model. Now I wish I had gone out to work sooner. I like working. I love the people I work with, the community we have here. My husband still farms of course. He had a struggle at first with me going out to work. But now he's proud of me."



## ADJUSTING TO AN OLDER WORK FORCE

As Canadian society becomes more positive towards mature workers, employer policies will change. In some cases progressive policies may need to come before real change will take place.

Japan, several northern European countries and advanced companies in the United States and Canada are currently developing programs which provide for lateral career shifts, post-retirement employment, retirees job banks, consultant positions and training positions. The result is a host of innovative programs to engage and encourage older workers' participation.

Typical workplace alternatives include some or all of the following:

- job redesign, transfer or reassignment
- increased opportunity for training
- alternative work schedules
- phased retirement, limiting hours or responsibilities
- recalling of retirees for busy times or consulting
- encouragement of second careers
- counselling
- part-time work

Retirement policies will need to reflect the increasing longevity of the population. When Otto VonBismarck suggested age 65 for retirement the average life expectancy was 47. If he was suggesting it now, one could extrapolate a retirement at the age of 127. Obviously adjustments will be made.

For economic, social, demographic and legal reasons the critical issue becomes how to use, rather than discard, the middle-aged and older worker. Their skills and experience are not available elsewhere in the labour market.

Some employers take advantage of the mature workers' expertise to solve problems, work on special projects or train younger workers. Numerous examples of ways to provide these persons with different forms of full-time or part-time employment are available. Check business magazines for specific experiments.

Continued employment in the later years of life is feasible, indeed is probably wise. People who want to work and are in good health should have the opportunity. Education and training will be necessary to keep skills upgraded and ensure good performance. The 21st century will see the number of youthful workers continue to decline, at the same time as the possibility emerges of extending the human lifespan for many well past the age of 100 with continued good health and vigour. This sets the stage for a revolution in the way we think about work and workers.

Developing methods of retaining workers and promoting human capital investment will take the co-operation of industry, government and the individual worker.

When Alberta realizes the rich resource offered by its older workers, when companies recognize the value of mature workers' experience, skill, and commitment, when older workers themselves appreciate their own worth and potential -- we will then have forged a whole new map of the working world, a map with no place for ageism.

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*I'm excited about turning 30. I feel that I've accomplished a lot, more than what I would have ever set out to do, so I'm happy with my life so far. Some people think that once they've reached their 40th birthday, it's like, "God, my life is half over!" But I've never known a game to be over in the first half; it is always won in the last half. I am looking forward to my years through 40 to whatever God will give me. I'll still be involved very much in exercise, still, hopefully, doing this show. By then, people will be saying, "Yah, look at how old she is, but boy, she can still exercise."*

**Cynthia Kereluk**  
TV exercise teacher

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# IN PRAISE OF OLDER WORKERS

## RESOURCES

### Alberta Career Development Centres

#### Canada Employment Centres

Phone: "0" + Zenith 22105

#### Placement 45

Phone: 429-0271

711, 10136 - 100 Street, Edmonton, Alberta

#### Access 45

Phone: 329-9150

Suite 200, Professional Bldg., 740 - 4th Avenue South  
Lethbridge, Alberta

#### Opportunity 45

Phone: 283-8002

1225A Kensington Road S.W., Calgary, Alberta

(Placement 45, Access 45 and Opportunity 45 are non-profit placement agencies that provide employment counselling and referral services to Albertans 45 and over)

#### Options for Women

Phone: 482-6567

#710, 10240 - 124 Street, Edmonton, Alberta  
(Employment Counsellors)

#### Women's Employment Resource Centre

Phone: 292-5992

1701 Centre West N.W., Calgary, Alberta

#### Career Information Hotline

Phone: "0" + Zenith 22140

### Additional Reading

- The Adult Back to School Book
- Job Seeker's Handbook
- Skills are your Passport

(All these publications produced by Career Resources and Programs are available at Career Development Centres across the province of Alberta.)

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